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Lights, camera, action!

How to produce a library minute

Videos are a useful and popular way to reach an audience—we all know videos that have gone viral online, garnering millions of views. However, the type of video that can compete with Old Spice commercials takes weeks to plan and produce, as well as a significant budget. Arizona State University (ASU) Libraries wanted to find a sustainable way to share videos that would require minimal staff time to create and produce. With that goal in mind, "The Library Minute" was born. We initially envisioned a weekly newscast, but it has evolved into a successful and fun video series. Episodes have been featured in *American Libraries Direct,*[1] as part of the *ACRL Marketing Minute,*[2] received more than 74,000 views[3] on YouTube and the Internet Archive, and have garnered complimentary e-mails from all over the world. Most importantly, they are a valuable marketing and outreach tool for the ASU Libraries and have increased our visibility to our students and other departments in the university.

After 30 episodes and nearly two years, we've learned a few lessons. This article shares what we've learned in the hope that it will be useful to other libraries interested in producing their own video series.

• **Have a plan.** It's easy to say you want to make a library video, but it helps to have some idea of what you want to accomplish. Before you begin, ask yourself a few questions. What is the purpose? Are you marketing the library? Are you creating tutorials? Who is the target audience? Have a clear goal in mind before you start production. Your videos will seem more professional and cohesive if they have a common purpose.

Still from "Protecting Your Stuff" video.

If you plan to feature people on camera, you'll need to choose your talent wisely. Do you have employees that have experience performing? They might be good choices to star in your videos. Any kind of performance experience helps, even if it's not in acting or theater. As the on-screen talent for "The Library Minute," I have found that my music performance background makes a big difference. My comfort in front of an audience serves me well in front of a camera. We recommend identifying one

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or two people to feature in order to give them practice and allow them to gain experience and confidence about being on-screen. You should also consider how video production will affect their workload—that may affect how many people you select.

Once you make your videos, how will your users find them? There are a variety of venues for storing and sharing videos. Our current method of distribution includes our Library Channel blog, the university's YouTube channel, and the Internet Archive. We advertise posts through Twitter and Facebook,[4] and they are also shown on the TV screens in all of the libraries. Some librarians have embedded videos in their LibGuides, and show them in orientation and instruction sessions. Brainstorm with your colleagues or workgroups to discover multiple avenues of bringing your content to your users.

Still from "Fun Things To Do at the Libraries" video.

• **Know your audience.** Evaluate your users and determine where your greatest need for communication lies. Focus your efforts on delivering quality content to a particular group, instead of trying to make everything relevant to everyone. All libraries serve a wide variety of users; at a large university library, we cater to faculty, researchers, graduate, and undergraduate students, among others. After a few test videos and much discussion, we decided to turn our attention to our largest user base: undergraduate students. Not only does this help us determine appropriate content topics, it also informs our creative decisions—what one group of users may find interesting or entertaining may not appeal to others. For example, many of our graduate students think "The Library Minute" is amusing, but consider the content too basic to be useful to them. Similarly, a professor may show an episode to her class, but wouldn't share it with her colleagues.

It can be a challenge to keep your content relevant to a specific audience. We often run joke ideas past our student intern to make sure they are not too obscure for undergraduates. It's also difficult to refrain from making an episode about a service that is only relevant to faculty or doctoral students. Always be aware of the user you hope to reach with your video, and make all your content and creative decisions based on their needs.

• **Content is king.** Once you've made a decision about the purpose and audience of your videos, stick to it. Plan your content accordingly. Sketch out ideas and themes in advance to allow time for creative inspiration and in order to generate music and image ideas before shooting. Sometimes the best ideas come at the last minute, so don't be afraid to shoot an episode even if the script is not perfect or complete. Many of our best episodes avoid having a strict script, but are created through improvisation around an outline with talking points.

Since our instruction teams already do a great job of creating online tutorials, we quickly decided to focus our efforts on providing information about library services and resources. This allows us to avoid confusion about what topics are appropriate for the video series as well as eliminate duplication of effort.

Scan this QR code with your mobile device to watch an episode of "The Library Minute."

Once "The Library Minute" became popular, our librarians began to request episodes on different topics. Having a defined focus helped our production team determine which topics would be most appropriate. Once we approved a topic, we create a Google Document and ask workgroups to generate an outline to ensure we covered all the important points. Some of our episodes were made to serve a special purpose, such as "Protecting Your Stuff," which was created at the request of our library administration to bring attention to a rash of laptop thefts in the library. The university's Department of Public Safety commended us for this episode. We also partnered with the university's online instruction department to create an episode about specific resources for online students.[5] Be open to suggestions and partnerships!

• **Keep things brief.** As librarians, we struggle to find the balance between making sure our users have the information they need, but not more than they want. The type of content will help determine how much time you need, but set a time limit on your videos. One of the reasons "The Library Minute" is so successful is that it is so short. We recommend keeping videos under 90 seconds. This will help your production schedule, as well—the longer your video, the more staff time you will need to produce it.

• **Work with what you have.** We were fortunate to have a significant amount of video equipment already, but you don't have to spend a lot of money on creating an elaborate studio.

We use the following equipment:

• production high definition video (HDV) camera

• green screen and frame

• video lights (enough to light subject and background separately)

• microphone (We have used a lavaliere microphone since "The Library Minute" began, but recently added a boom microphone to our gear. Avoid using the built-in camera microphone—good quality audio is a must.)

• audio mixer board

• video tapes

• editing software (we use Final Cut Pro)

• cue cards or story boards for the actors/actresses (we use scrap paper)

• miscellaneous supplies (tape, power cords, etc.)

Where is the best place to film your videos? Ideally, you want to find a secure location where you can store your equipment as well as reduce the amount of background noise and distractions. We initially filmed our videos in a staff area in the library, which

The author on "The Library Minute" set.

not only was inconvenient for our production crew because of the need to set up and take down after every session, but also posed a considerable inconvenience to the nearby staff, who were requested to be as quiet as possible during filming. Fortunately, after proving "The Library Minute" was a valuable use of staff time and equipment, we were able to get permission to commandeer a little-used conference room to use for our future productions.

Once again, look for in-house skills and talents for production. We have a staff member with a film background who produces and edits all of our media productions, as well as a student intern from the film studies program. They take about 30 minutes to set up the equipment prior to shooting each episode. Taping can take anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes for a one-minute episode, depending on topics, number of takes, and how

well the performance goes. After shooting, it takes one to two weeks to edit the video, depending on other demands on staff time and schedules.

• **Allow yourself time to experiment.** Don't expect your initial efforts to be perfect. We taped our first episode without the intention of ever broadcasting or publishing it. I had never done anything in front of a camera before, we weren't sure about the amount of content or proper pacing for a minute-long video, and we didn't have a clear vision of what the final product might look like. By giving ourselves the freedom to experiment with a couple of episodes without pressure or the expectation of instant success, we were able to be creative and brainstorm a standard format and theme that have been successful throughout the series. We did three test episodes to discover how much content we could fit in one minute, as well as gain experience and comfort in front of a camera. We learned much from watching our initial productions: keep your eye on the camera, smile more, and don't be afraid to move. We later reworked some of the first videos and released them as finished products, but the test videos will never be seen by the public. Experimentation gives you the freedom to discover your own strengths and how to make your videos unique to your library. Once you let go of the initial pressure to produce perfection, you're more likely to find your video voice.

• **Nothing's set in stone.** You may find after doing several episodes that you want to change direction. After creating episodes that highlighted a specific time of the year or event, such as summer break or our 2009 Constitution Day event, we realized that we preferred videos that we could reuse. We spent enough time and effort creating the videos that it seemed wasteful for them to only be useful for a limited time. We now make sure that our topics can be reused throughout the year.

We also modified our production schedule, which initially involved creating and releasing one new episode each week. We managed this for an entire semester. After exhausting most of the obvious topics, as well as struggling to find appropriate jokes, we relaxed our schedule and now produce a new episode once we have a new topic and theme fleshed out.

• **Have fun.** Don't take yourself too seriously. Face it, none of us are in the movie business, and our libraries don't have the production budget of a Hollywood studio. Accept that your videos won't be perfect, your acting won't win you awards, you'll have limits to your editing time and special effects, and the topics won't always be the most exciting. Once you've let go of those reservations, you can relax, have fun making the videos, and play to your strengths. Your videos will reflect your enjoyment of them, which encourages your audience to enjoy them, as well.

Conclusion

We feel that we've come a long way from our initial attempts at video production. We're happy with the reaction and feedback we've received for "The Library Minute." However, it continues to evolve, and we will continue to improve our marketing efforts for the ASU Libraries. We hope that other libraries will be encouraged by our experience to create their own videos.

Notes

1. "Actions and Answers: Protecting Your Stuff in the Library," *American Libraries Direct,* March 3, 2010, americanlibrariesmagazine. org/al_direct/03032010.

2. *ACRL Marketing Minute,* April 27, 2010, www.facebook.com/posted. php?id=274133232664&share_id=11442311 1924345&comments=1#s114423111924345.

3. There were 74,000 views of "The Library Minute" as of April 13, 2011.

4. Library Channel Blog: lib.asu.edu /librarychannel, Twitter: twitter.com /LibraryChannel, Facebook: www.facebook. com/ASULibraries.

5. "The Library Minute: Top 5 Resources for Online Students," June 2, 2010, www. youtube.com/watch?v=s-LnKmDBKME. ℳ